

Teaching
with Small
Boats Alliance
Conference
2017

April 26-29, 2017

Chesapeake Bay
Maritime Museum
St. Michaels, Md.



The Longship Company Experience: Learning from Longships

Bruce Edward Blackistone

April 27, 2017

(www.longshipco.org)

45 Years Aft the Mast

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Origins

- Popular Culture- a blessing and a curse.
- The “cool” factor- You need a hook.
- “Crazy” friends.
- Opportunity and infrastructure; thank you, U. of Maryland.
- Educational content.
- Cultural context.
- Initial organization- mistakes and missteps.
- Shoestrings- how long, how much?
- 1976- personal obligations

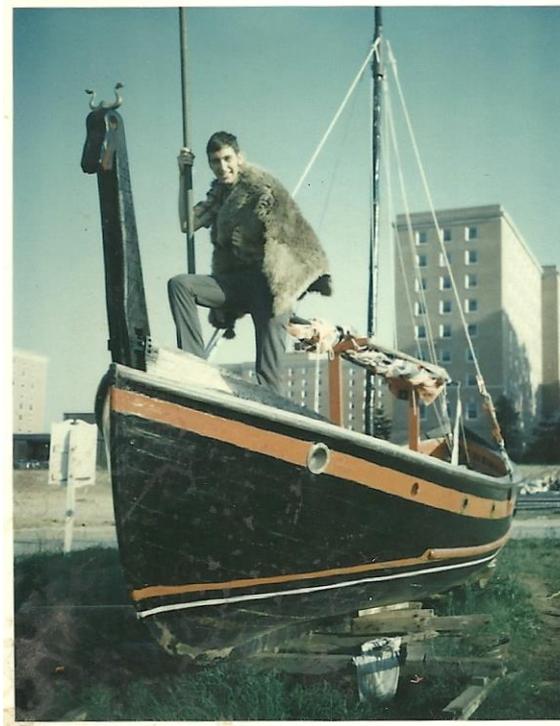
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Somehow, we got it together, and afloat...



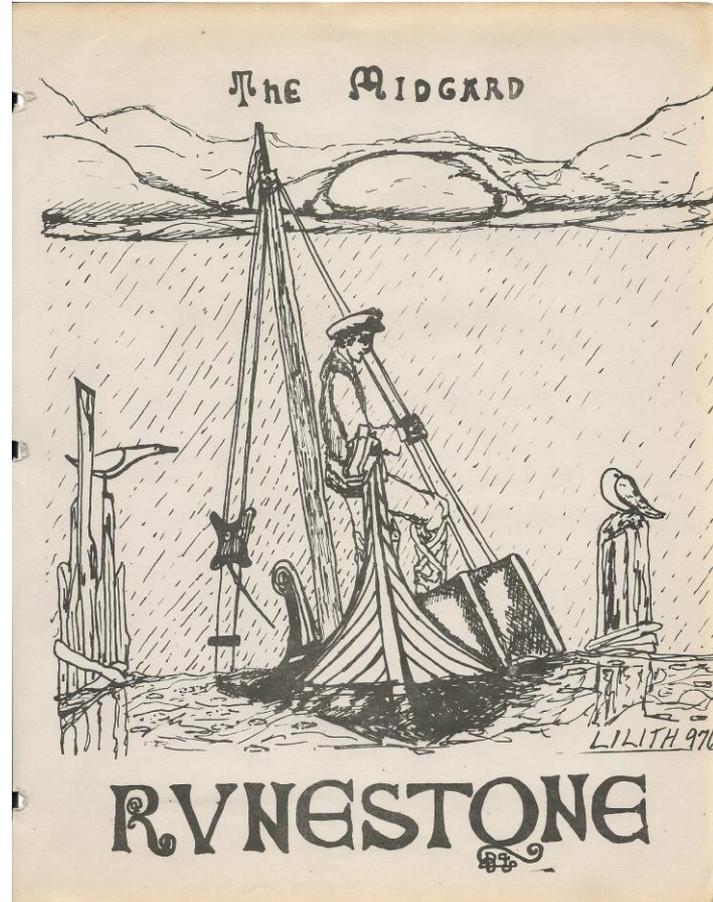
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When the Shoestring Runs Out!



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Sailing into the mists of time...





The Hard Truth of Replica Ships

- “Romance” can kill you.
- Historically, these ships were engines of state (warships) or engines of commerce (merchant vessels) and they paid their own way by plunder, taxation, or profit.
- Historic vessels tend to cost money even when standing still, much less while in full operation.
- It costs about ~\$1,000,000 for a modern “relic” to sit at the dock.
- Many traditional wooden ship designs are “rot factories” and required extensive rebuilds during their careers.

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Sure, now make a liar out
of me!



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In 1979, there was an advertisement in the National Fisherman.

- Modest ambitions are usually better
- We found some plans for a very small “viking” ship.
- We found a builder who knew what he was doing.



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...and the next thing we knew, we were back in action!

- “King Harald Hardratha didn’t build his own ships, and neither do we!”
- Reorganized as a non-profit educational organization instead of a cross between a campus club and a joint stock company.





The learning curve swings steeper...

- Dues
- Loan
- Incorporation
- By-Laws
- Recruiting
- Begging
- Organization-
Corporate
Officers vs. Ship's
Officers
- Longship Company
Manual
- Duties and Rights
of the Crew
- Operations-
Neither Royal Navy
nor anarchy.
- Articles of the
Voyage
- “Creative mutiny.”

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Gratuitous pretty pictures to
relieve the constant stream
of chatter...



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Further Acquisitions: The Gyrfalcon



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Mobility, Publicity & Recruiting: Educating the public while “dry-land sailing”



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When Things Go Wrong: Newfoundland, A.D. 2000



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Research and Expansion

- The size of the vessel should reflect the size, and health, of the organization; don't get too ambitious, too soon.
- Several smaller vessels could be more versatile than one oversized vessel.
- Money and manpower- do you have 30+ friends for an afternoon jaunt on your longship?
- Who scrapes the bottom?
- What are your resources for historical and archeological research?

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Evolution-

- Founders should not cling to power; know when to step back and hand it over.
- A small core group ALWAYS does most of the stuff; but you can shift into a guidance roll for newer members
- Start a “new ship fund” the day you get your current ship. The group’s needs, and research regarding these vessels, are always changing.
- Members who don’t pay their dues but show up for work parties are as good as members who pay their dues but can’t show up for a voyage. You can use both; but encourage both to do both.

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It Takes a Village to Raze a Village



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Food, clothing, shelter, power- women's work!

- Every thread and stitch in the sails, the clothes on your back, provisions in your pack, the tents you sheltered under were all, primarily, women's work!
- People who can take a field of flax or a flock of sheep and turn into useful things are not to be wasted.
- What they lack in physical power, they tend to make up for in physical endurance.



“Of course, the women would not have rowed.”
(British historian and author)

- Fully integrated, in organization and crew, from the very beginning.
- It’s the 21st century; get used to it!
- Viking women were among the most independent of their time.
- “Hey, ya wanna come out on my 40 foot yacht?” (sure-fire hunk and chick bait)
- We emphasize current and historic attitudes towards our roles and our abilities.

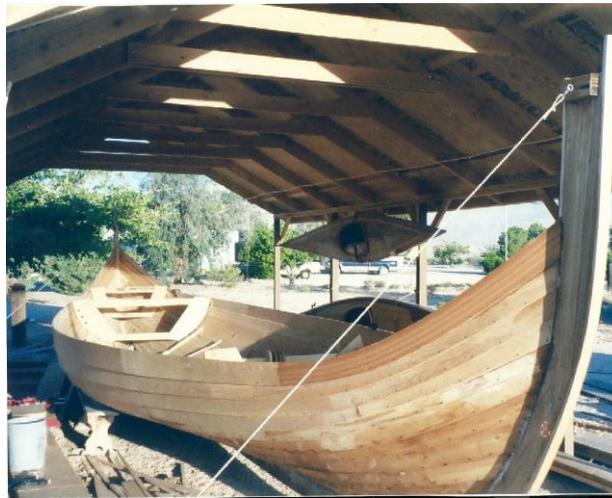
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...and then we needed a
new ship.



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Newer, bigger, better, and a lot more work- a race horse instead of a sturdy dray.



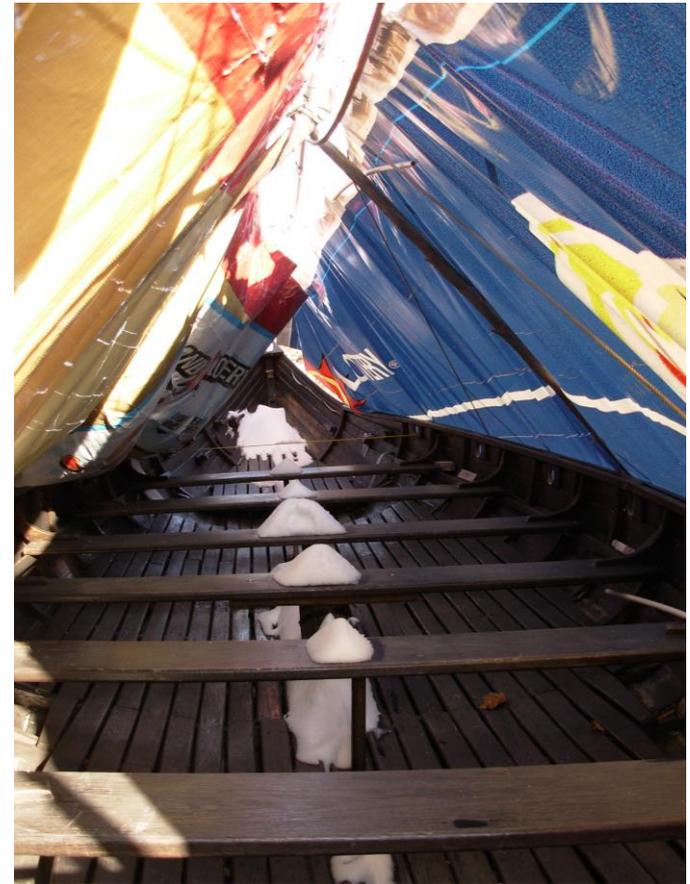
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The old ship's tent...



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...and the new winter quarters:



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“We’ll take you out for free.
Bringing you back is open to
negotiation and will, most likely,
involve rowing.”



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Experimentation continues...



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Questions?



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Thank you!

